

Josiah H. and William A. Cunningham Letters PC.1899

Finding aid prepared by Fran Tracy-Walls

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

State Archives of North Carolina
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Summary Information

Repository	State Archives of North Carolina
Title	Josiah H. and William A. Cunningham Letters
Date [inclusive]	1861-1865
Extent	1.0 boxes
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Josiah H. Cunningham (ca. 1841-1863) and William Alexander Cunningham (ca. 1843-1904) were sons of George Washington (ca. 1807-1872) and Susan Turner Rives Cunningham (ca. 1817-1901), Granville County. On 8 June, 1861, the two brothers enlisted as privates, trained at a school of cavalry instruction at Camp Beauregard, Ridgeway, Warren County. It was there that the 9th Regiment N.C. State Troops (1st Regiment N. C. Cavalry) was formed on 12 August 1861. William survived the war, but Josiah was wounded 15 October 1863 near Manassas Junction, Va., and died the following day.</p>
Abstract	<p>Consists of fifty-six letters, the majority of which were written by the Cunningham brothers to family at home. Of these, a small quantity were written by Daniel B. Duke, company bugler, and by Robert D. Grisham/Grissom, a private, both from Granville County, and one by Turner, probably a kinsman. Most of the letters consisted of references to life in the camps, with news that would be of interest to family at home, and did not dwell on the dangers and horrors of war. A couple of letters after Josiah's death provide a few scant details to the grieving family.</p>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item] in PC.1899, Josiah H. and William A. Cunningham Letters, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C., U.S.A.

Biographical Note

Cunningham Family

Josiah H. Cunningham (ca. 1841-1863) and William Alexander Cunningham (ca. 1843-1904) were sons of George Washington (ca. 1807-1872) and Susan Turner Rives Cunningham (ca. 1817-1901), Granville County. The Cunningham family farmed in the Epping Forest area of the county, near present-day Kittrell, Vance County. George W., a Virginia native, and Susan, born in North Carolina, had a family of nine children living with them at the time of the 1860 federal census enumeration. The eldest was Mary [Elizabeth], age twenty, followed by Josiah, age nineteen, William, age seventeen, and six more children as young as three years of age.

On 8 June 1861 the brothers, Josiah (also known as Joseph and Joe) and William, enlisted and began service as privates, and subsequently attached to Company E, with men from Warren, Franklin, and Granville counties. Prior to orders to Richmond in early October, this company and others in the regiment trained at a school of cavalry instruction, at Camp Beauregard, Rideway, Warren County. It was there that the 9th Regiment N.C. State Troops (1st Regiment N. C. Cavalry) was formed on 12 August 1861.

Josiah and William were captured at Beverly Ford, Va., on 9 June 1863. By 30 June Josiah had been paroled and exchanged at City Point, Va. William, however, had been wounded in battle and by August paroled and exchanged, but confined in a Petersburg hospital. On 15 October Josiah was wounded in an engagement near Manassas Junction, Va., and died the next day near Warrenton, Va. Two letters in the collection indicate that he was buried at Culpeper Court House, Virginia.

During the next year William suffered a gunshot wound to his upper leg and was subsequently admitted to the hospital in Richmond, Va., 5 May 1864. He returned to duty on 2 June. According to the *North Carolina Troops Roster*, he was present or accounted for through December of 1864. The collection contains three letters from William in 1865 in camp, with the dates, 5 February (Hickford, Va.), 22 February (Camp 1st N.C. Cavalry), and 3 March (Camp. 1st N.C. Cavalry near Stanley Creek), indicating his service at least through the latter date.

William survived the war, and on 10 January 1868 married Mary Elizabeth Powell in Franklin County. Like his father, William farmed, and he and his wife became parents of several children. By the 1880 U.S. Federal Census, the couple was living in Haysville, Franklin County with two boys and two girls.

Daniel B. Duke

Daniel Duke (b. ca. 1841-), Granville County, enlisted 24 June 1861, as a private and became part of the same company and regiment as the Cunningham brothers, Co. E, 9th Regiment N.C.R.T (1st Regiment N.C. Cavalry). He was mustered in, however, as a buglar, and present or accounted for through December of 1864.

Robert D. Grissom/Grisham Robert Grissom (b. ca. 1837-), Granville County, enlisted 8 June 1861, as a private and became part of the same company and regiment as the Cunningham brothers, Co. E, 9th

Regiment N.C.R.T (1st Regiment N.C. Cavalry). He was present or accounted for through December of 1864. He was paroled at Appomattox Court House, Va., 9 April 1864.

Collection Overview:

Consists of fifty-six letters, the majority of which were written to family at home by Josiah H. and William A. Cunningham, during Confederate service, Company E, 9th Regiment, N.C. S.T. (1st Regiment N.C. Cavalry). Of these, a small quantity were written by Daniel B. Duke, a bugler, and by Robert D. Grissom, a private, both from Granville County and in the same company as the Cunninghams, plus one letter apparently signed by a Turner, probably a kinsman. Many of the letters consist of references to provisions, clothing, health matters, life in the camps, to a few outside social events, and inclusion of general news that would be of interest to family at home, but usually avoid dwelling on the dangers and horrors of war. There are various references to the horses, some suggesting the poor condition of many in their charge because of conditions and inadequate shelter. A couple of letters after Josiah's death provide a few details of the sort sought by grieving families, but appear inadequate in the face of the devastating loss of the family's eldest son.

The letters were written by men who were semi-literate and who tended to spell phonetically. However, the overall condition of the letters is good and the legibility is better than average.

Collection Arrangement:

Chronological

Administrative Information

Publication Information

State Archives of North Carolina August 2014

Access Restrictions

Available for research

Legal Status note

Gift

Copyright Notice

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Acquisitions Information

Donated by J. Karl Grimm, Durham, N.C.; Karen Grimm Warren, Montross, Va.; and Roy Michael Grimm, Boone, N.C., 1999.

Processing Information note

Processed by George Stevenson; Fran Tracy-Walls

Finding Aid by Fran Tracy-Walls

Appraisal note

Collection appraised by Stephen M. Rowe, and a copy of cover letter to the donors dated 14 December 1999. He noted in the letter that "with the exception of the Duke and Grisham letters, this collections tends to be rather mundane. The Cunninhgam brothers saw little heavy combat and recorded almost nothing of real historical interest." However, I, the writer of the finding aid, see value the letters in their social, family, and personal aspects, suggesting a larger picture beyond battle details. Fran Tracy-Walls

Related Materials

Related Collections

Additional information on topics found in this collection may be found in the Manuscript and Archives Reference System (MARS) <http://mars.archives.ncdcr.gov/BasicSearch.aspx>

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Confederate States of America. Army. North Carolina. Cavalry Regiment, 1st.

Family Name(s)

- Cunningham family

Genre(s)

- Letters

Geographic Name(s)

- Granville County (N.C.)
- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Personal Name(s)

- Cunningham, Josiah H.
- Cunningham, William Alexander
- Duke, Daniel B.
- Grissom, Robert D.

General note

There is another private collection, named Cunningham Letters, PC. 1455, consisting of two letters of George L. and J.N. Cunningham, 1961, 1862, to family, written from Raleigh, N.C., and Yorktown, Va., and describing camp life. There does not appear at this time to be a connection between the two families.

Sources:

JoAnna B. McDaniel, ed. and Roy Grimm, *Cunningham Letters* [consists of transcriptions], vol. 2 of Civil War Documents: Granville County, North Carolina (Oxford: Granville County Historical Society, Inc.); Louis H. Manarin, comp., *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster*, (Raleigh: Division

of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resource, 1966-), 2: 46-48. North Carolina Marriage Bonds, 1741-1868. United States Federal Census, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880.

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Correspondence, 1861	PC.1899	1
<p>Most of the eight letters in this collection written during 1861 were from Josiah H. Cunningham, Camp Beauregard, to his sister, Mary E. Cunningham. There is one letter from R. [Robert] D. Grisham, also encamped at Camp Beauregard. Toward the end of the year Josiah wrote that letters be addressed to him at Centerville, Fairfax County, Va. The last letter from Josiah in 1861, dated 27 Decemeber, was written about five miles from Mannassas. Filled with some references to William and details of interest to the family, the letter includes reports of the weather, winter clothing matters ("we have all got overcoats but thay is toar"), his apparent newly acquired ability to cook good biscuits, desire for tobacco, etc.</p>		
Correspondence, 1862	PC.1899	2
<p>Several of these seventeen letters (plus an undated piece) are from William, primarily to his father, mother, and sister. The first letters of 1862 were written from Manassas Junction, Va. From early April, the brothers were encamped in Lenoir County, N.C. A letter from Josiah to his sister, 25 May, describes more hard military action than usual, with the following details about the source of provisions: "we stayed whare a large farm was and all the negroes had ran away and gorn to yankeydom and all the white people had moved away and left all the hogs corn and fodder chickens ducks and every thing else." By a letter of 12 June, Josiah and William were at camp near Petersburg, Virginia. Subsequent letters reflect movements west of Petersburg.</p>		

Correspondence, 1863

PC.1899

3

Contains some twenty-one letters with two letters together, 30 August 1863. During 1863 Josiah and William were captured at Beverly Ford, Va. on 9 June. On the 11th a Daniel B. Duke wrote their father an account of the action and his sons' status. Though William was wounded, the tone of the letter was resassuring. He respectfully concluded with his trust and hope "it will not be long before William and Joe will return back to the company for they are great mist [sic] their is no braver boys in the Southern army than they are." Josiah subsequently wrote home several consoling letters. The brothers were exchanged at City Point 30 June. On 16 September Josiah wrote his father from Orange Court House, including several references to injuries, deaths, and a report that his own horse was shot in the right foreleg, and his fear that he will have to leave him if his regiment should have to leave in the next days. Toward the end of the letter, Josiah wrote that "I am looking for the big battle now every day but I am in hopes it will not come." A month later Josiah was wounded in action near Manassas on 15 October and died of his wounds the next day. Robert D. Grisham/Grissom wrote Mr. Cunningham that it was his "unhappy lot to inform him" of this circumstance and to care until further word for items saved from the battlefield: an "overcoat oil cloth pocket book a knife" along with some money. The letter also informed the father that Josiah was buried at Culpeper County Court House, and alluded to a doctor who was with him at his death. A letter of 14 December to "Dear Sister" from Turner[?] make reference to Josiah's family's ongoing grief and quest for unanswered questions, but reports that he cannot find out what doctor was with him when he died, nor the sergeant in charge of the ambulance train. He laments that "I wish I could give Mrs. Cunninhgam ... Satisfaction about his death. I dont think She aught [sic] to greave [sic]...he requested that non of his folks Should not greave after him he was prepared for a better world than this."

Correspondence, 1864

PC.1899

4

The seven letters in this folder were all written by William to his mother and sister. A letter of 12 April comments that "Gov Vance as ben [sic] going about among the N.C. Tropes [sic] speeking [sic] I understand he say he has got enough clothing scattered about over N.C. to supply his tropes for the next two years...I had much rather see them coming than to hear talk of them." On 5 May William was reportedly returned to a Richmond hospital with a gunshot wound to his upper leg, but returned to duty on 2 June. A letter of 5 June was written from the General Hospital, Danville, Va. in a ward he had been in before. William reported, however, that he too had been dressing wounds nearly all the morning. In addition to seeking news home, William wanted to know the general opinion of the population regarding peace and a report on whether the seventeen year-old boys have been sent out. Lamenting the death of his cousin, Luis Duke, William's various comments about the fighting include the comment that "I sincerely trust there will not be any more fighting after this Battle is over." A letter of 28 June, Danville, Va., reports his sorrow in learning that cousin J. Lancaster was killed.

Correspondence, 1865

PC.1899

5

The *North Carolina Troops Roster* indicates that William was present or accounted for through December of 1864. This collection contains three letters of 1865, written 5 and 22 February and 3 March by William to his sister and to his father and mother respectively. His war-weariness is expressed directly in statements such as "I hope the time is not far distant when this old war will stop and I must think it will terminate soon." The last letter references Daniel Duke going back home and William's more mundane hope that Daniel will return with some of his requests, including envelopes, a pipe, and particularly clothing: pants, gloves, a shirt, drawers, for the latter two are "not fit to ware [sic] when we get them." The letters were marked as follows: 5 February (Hickford, Va.), 22 February (Camp 1st N.C. Cavalry), and 3 March (Camp. 1st N.C. Cavalry near Stanley Creek),